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## PROHIBITION IN ENGLAND.

BY SIR WILFRID LAWSON, M. P.

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IT HAS been suggested to me that a short account of what has been done, what is being done, and what it is hoped may be done, by those who on this side of the Atlantic are striving to overturn the liquor traffic, would be of interest to the numerous readers of *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*. I shall take pleasure, as president of the "United-Kingdom Alliance to Procure the Total and Immediate Legislative Suppression of the Traffic in Intoxicating Liquors as Beverages," in endeavoring to give such an account. But I wish it to be understood that, for the accuracy of the facts stated and for the value of the opinions expressed, I take the sole individual responsibility.

I need not waste many words in describing the ravages which are wrought by drink. From the days when "Noah planted a vineyard and drank of the wine, and was drunken," until the present time, unvarying experience has proved the truth of the refrain of one of our English temperance melodies, "Where there's drink there's danger." In the words of Lord Randolph Churchill, "each generation becomes more and more alcoholized, more fatally liable to crime, poverty, and disease."

This was the truth which was firmly impressed on the minds of those social reformers who, in the year 1853, formed that "Alliance" which I have already mentioned. It is not now, nor has it ever been, either a partisan, a denominational, or a purely total-abstinence organization. The words used by the Provisional Committee, who took the first steps for its formation, have always seemed to me to be most interesting and instructive. They said: "Our trust is that it will never be compressed to a mere teetotal effort,—never be warped by any sectarian bias, nor marred by any political partisanship. Our earnest desire is that its basis may be firmly laid and faithfully maintained

on grounds as broad and catholic as principle and patriotism will admit of, and we pray that all its aims and operations may be conceived and conducted in a devoted spirit of the conscientious discharge of duty to God and to humanity." "Signed on behalf of the Provisional Committee, this first day of June, 1853. William Harvey, Nathaniel Card, Samuel Pope, and Thomas H. Barker, Chairman and Secretaries."

These good and clear-headed men saw plainly enough that the admirable temperance and teetotal organizations—vast as was the good they had done in the past—were almost fatally blocked in their onward career, so long as the legalized facilities for the sale of drink were spread broadcast among the people. They perceived that, as the law sanctioned these mischievous temptations, it was only by an alteration in the law that the evil could be removed; and they perceived also that the only way to obtain the desired alteration in the law was by enlightening and educating public opinion up to the pitch at which it should imperatively demand from the Legislature the required reform. At the first meeting of the General Council, held in Manchester in October, 1853, when the society was publicly inaugurated, the following declaration was unanimously adopted as a basis for the agitation and as indicating the character and scope of the movement:

"1. That it is neither right nor politic for the State to afford legal protection and sanction to any traffic or system that tends to increase crime, to waste the national resources, to corrupt the social habits, and to destroy the health and lives of the people.

"2. That the traffic in intoxicating liquors, as common beverages, is inimical to the true interests of individuals, and destructive to the order and welfare of society, and ought, therefore, to be prohibited.

"3. That the history and results of all past legislation in regard to the liquor traffic abundantly prove that it is impossible satisfactorily to limit or regulate a system so essentially mischievous in its tendencies.

"4. That no considerations of private gain or public revenue can justify the upholding of a system so utterly wrong in principle, suicidal in policy, and disastrous in results, as the traffic in intoxicating liquors.

"5. That the legislative prohibition of the liquor traffic is perfectly compatible with rational liberty and with all the claims of justice and legitimate commerce.

"6. That the legislative suppression of the liquor traffic would be highly conducive to the development of a progressive civilization.

"7. That, rising above class, sectarian, or party considerations, all good citizens should combine to procure an enactment prohibiting the sale of intoxicating beverages, as affording most efficient aid in removing the appalling evil of intemperance."

Sir Walter C. Trevelyan, Bart., was the first president of the Alliance, and soon after its formation he astonished the political world by declaring at a great party dinner: "I am also happy to announce that in that important town (Manchester), where originated the celebrated and mighty league which ended with the abolition of the Corn Laws, there is now organizing another mighty league, which will, I trust, be as victorious as its predecessor, and succeed in removing from our dear fatherland a much greater curse."

The Alliance, of course, at once encountered all the hatred, opposition, and ridicule which in this world are liberally bestowed on movements designed to do any good. But multitudes of the most earnest and successful workers in the Temperance Reformation saw that it filled the very place which it was necessary should be filled if that reformation was to be successful. Father Mathew, especially, hailed its formation with rapture.

But the legalized drink-shops remained, and in some districts were increased in number; and it might be said that the last state of Ireland—as regards drinking—was nearly as bad as its first. It was long before the Alliance obtained any support from the great ones of the earth. The nobility, clergy, and gentry, as a rule, disliked and despised it, and the nobility, clergy, and gentry form a mighty power in this Old World of ours.

The "statesmen," like statesmen everywhere else, watching the "jumping cat," thought they perceived that the liquor-selling interest was stronger than the opponents of that interest, and acted accordingly; while the liquor sellers themselves, their dependents, their dupes, and their organs in the press, could not find words sufficiently strong to express their indignation and their fury against those who even remotely interfered with "the hope of their gains." "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," cried the makers of silver shrines; and "Great is Bacchus of the Beer-shops," shouted the makers of strong drinks, and so loudly that for a time they drowned the still small voice of reason.

Lord Randolph Churchill, whom I have already quoted, has declared his belief that "two-thirds of the members of the present House of Commons are inspired by a terror of the organization of the alcoholic liquor trade, wholesale and retail." If this be the case in a House of Commons elected by a democratic electorate, it may be imagined what the state of things was

more than twenty-five years ago, when first a prohibitory measure was formally proposed in Parliament. It was simply a measure providing that licensing authorities should not be allowed to license places for the sale of drink in localities where the population should have definitely, and by decisive majorities, expressed a wish to be free from such licensed houses. It was called the "Permissive Prohibitory Liquor Bill," as it simply gave permission to the public to protect itself from the drink-sellers. The traders saw in the measure "the thin edge of the wedge," and resisted it accordingly. The philosophers invented the phrase, "You can't make people sober by act of Parliament" (which, of course, really condemned all legislation specially devoted to alcoholic drinks); and the statesmen were disgusted at the simplicity of the measure.

Whenever the bill came before the House, these statesmen used to take up much time in discussing and censuring its details and machinery. At last it was decided by some friend of prohibition that it would be well to move a resolution simply affirming the principle of the above measure, leaving the details to be filled in after the principle had been affirmed. This plan had a certain amount of success, and on three occasions, by increasing majorities, a resolution affirming the right of localities to the power of protecting themselves from the liquor traffic was affirmed by the House of Commons. The last resolution of the thrée was carried on April 27, 1883, and runs as follows :

"That the interests of the nation urgently require some efficient measure of legislation, by which, in accordance with the resolution already passed and re-affirmed by this House, a legal power of restraining the issue and renewal of licenses for the sale of intoxicating liquors may be placed in the hands of the persons most interested and affected, namely, the inhabitants themselves."

This resolution was passed by 264 against 177, including tellers and pairs ; and since its adoption we have had five different governments, including the one then in office, most of whose members supported the resolution, yet nothing has been done to carry it into effect. The Prohibition party out of doors have been urgent that action should be taken, but something or other has always been found, or been invented, to block the way. Surely it is not going too far to describe this delay as both discreditable and deplorable.

The reader will now, I hope, understand how matters stand

with us. The principle of optional local self-protection from the liquor traffic is admitted by Parliament, but Parliament has not yet been induced to give that principle legislative effect. And so the drink traffic with all its accompanying horrors goes on from year to year, filling our gaols, workhouses and asylums, entailing greater burdens on the sober and industrious portion of the community, and unchecked, except by the variable, uncertain, and capricious exercise of the authority which is placed in the hands of our magistrates, a body who, as a whole, are much more in sympathy with the makers and sellers of drink than with the victims of the dreadful business.

When one thinks of these victims, he is sometimes inclined to say, "No man careth for their souls," or bodies either. All that the unfortunates are considered fit for by the powers that be is to swell the national revenue derived from the sale of alcohol—which is, according to one of our greatest modern English doctors, a "most deleterious poison." It is almost astounding that this revenue, after more than half a century of temperance teaching and preaching, after the attainment also of all kinds of educational, sanitary, and religious reforms—which we have so often been told would stop excessive drinking,—it is, I say, almost astounding to find this revenue still of the enormous magnitude in which it has been revealed by late financial statements. Not long ago a Chancellor of the Exchequer seemed to be himself appalled at the figures which he had to produce to the House of Commons. He said that the receipts from the consumption of alcohol had increased, as compared with the preceding year, by £1,800,000. After expatiating for some time on this amazing and, as he seemed really to feel, most regrettable fact, he came to the conclusion that "something must be done. Thus, one of our ablest public men, when once he began to look this business in the face, saw that legislation could do nothing to promote temperance except by diminishing the legalized temptations to drinking.

I have already indicated that this matter of licensing is in our country—with but trifling exceptions—in the hands of the magistracy, a body not appointed by any popular election, but selected by the Lord Chancellor mainly on account of birth, wealth, or social position. It is because they have neglected to protect the public by withholding drink-licenses that these frightful evils, which horrified the Chancellor of the Exchequer referred to,

have grown up amongst us. It seemed, then, that the only way of meeting the difficulty would be to intrust this "veto" power to stronger, or, in other words, more popular bodies. Accordingly, the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposed to give to our County Councils, which, roughly speaking, are our local parliaments, the power of ridding their neighborhoods of such drink-shops as they thought fit to remove. It is probable that many County Councils would have eagerly availed themselves of this power in order to benefit and purify these neighborhoods. But here comes in perhaps the most extraordinary proposition which has been made to the House of Commons in modern times. The Chancellor of the Exchequer proposed that some hundreds of thousands of pounds should be taken annually from the taxes of the country and handed over to these County Councils in order that they might pay "compensation"—as he called it in his speech—to those persons who were pecuniarily interested in the liquor shops to be disestablished.

It was admitted that these places were public evils—otherwise there would have been no proposition to get rid of them; it was a part of the law of the land that they held their licenses only for the space of one year, liable to have those licenses withheld when that time had elapsed, at the option of the magistrates, whose duty is supposed to be to act for the public protection. It was known that those interested in these places had made money by them, for no one would persistently carry on a losing business; and yet, after all this, the Chancellor coolly proposed that these men—many of whom had amassed fabulous wealth through the monopoly of the sale of drink—should likewise be enriched by public money when they were compelled to give up selling drink. Whatever position they were in, the public was to pay them. The great liquor trade was one of the main supports of a previous government, and the determination of the latter to give the brewers, who are the principal owners of public-house property, a new parliamentary title and increased value to that property looked very much like the outcome of that gratitude which, no doubt, the government felt to the brewers, and which has also been defined as a "lively sense of favors to come."

The brewers were delighted. They at once saw that so soon as public money had been given for the non-renewal of a single license—which ought to have been withheld by the licensing au-

thority—from that moment the value of licensed property would be indefinitely augmented. But the friends of national sobriety saw it also. They saw it, and they were determined that what Mr. Caine aptly called this great “financial barrier” should not be erected in defence of what one of our public men not long since called this “desolating trade.”

So the fight began in real earnest. The government tried hard to popularize their measure by saying—what was perfectly true—that, if carried, it would lead to a certain diminution in the number of public houses. But very few temperance men were influenced by this argument, since they saw clearly that the “financial barrier” which I have mentioned would in the end be a far greater help to the liquor trade than would the purchasing of a few licenses by the County Councils be a damage to it.

One of the largest outdoor demonstrations which ever gathered together assembled in Hyde Park to denounce the compensation scheme. The brewers replied by a monster petition signed by hundreds of thousands of persons, which was presented to the House of Commons with great pomp and ceremony. The ministers of the Crown kept on declaring that their measure was a temperance measure. Mr. Gladstone, Sir W. Harcourt, Mr. Fowler, Sir George Trevelyan, and other leading men of the Liberal party, with vigor and eloquence drove home the reply that the “endowment of public houses” with public money could not possibly be a temperance measure.

The Church of England Temperance Society—alone amid the great temperance societies—looked with some amount of favor on the government scheme; but, on the other hand, all the other temperance organizations were, so to speak, furiously opposed to it, and in their opposition were cordially supported by almost all the religious denominations in the country, who had never on any occasion been so thoroughly welded together as they now were in resisting this scheme for the endowment of the greatest foe to religion and morality which the world has ever seen.

In the House of Commons itself the scene was even more striking. The government—the strongest which we have known for many a day—being re-enforced by a strong contingent of their former opponents, who are now more conservative than the Conservatives, continually vowed and protested that they meant to carry their bill at all hazards—thereby echoing the shouts of de-



fiance which it was ordered should be uttered every morning by the Conservative press. All the great measures of the session were postponed for the sake of gratifying the brewers by the passing of this bill. All amendments were rejected. The rank and file of the party were daily summoned to the House to assist in forcing it through. But here the difficulty began. "You can call spirits from the vasty deep, but will they come?" You can send out "whips" for members to come down to the House to vote for government measures, but will they come down when they suspect public opinion is against them? No, they won't, and so the government found out. Gradually, the majorities of that strong administration melted away, growing small by degrees and beautifully less, until on the first clause of the bill they only secured a majority of four. This virtually sounded the knell of the measure, and, though the government struggled doggedly on till the last, the compensation scheme had to be abandoned ultimately, after it had been for about two months before the country, causing during these two months more excitement and indignation than it had seemed possible that any legislative proposition could have produced in so short a space of time.

The great drink question, then, stands thus on this side of the Atlantic: There is a virtual unanimity among the statesmen of all parties that the places licensed for the sale of drink are too numerous. The Conservative statesmen, who make this avowal, also declare that, as they have failed in providing for their diminution by allotting public money for the benefit of those houses which may be dis-established, nothing more is likely to be done by politicians to promote temperance "for the next twenty years." The Liberal statesmen who formerly succeeded in their resistance to the Conservative scheme above mentioned, it must be assumed, have some plan ready for the reduction in the number of drinking houses, inasmuch as they have joined with the Tory statesmen in denouncing the superabundance of such places. The Prohibition party, meanwhile, sticks to its simple, straightforward demand, that it should be placed in the "option" of dwellers in specified localities to protect themselves. The Prohibitionists only ask for what are called, in reference to Africa, "uncontaminated zones," that is, districts without liquor shops, where local public opinion clearly demands that such shall be the case.

Not long ago Parliament, for the first time in our political history, gave a majority in favor of Sunday closing—for England. It also, by an overwhelming majority carried the second reading of a bill designed to curtail the sale of liquor in Ireland on Sundays generally, instead of with exceptions, which is now the law, and also to curtail its sale considerably on Saturdays. But neither of these measures has been carried through and inscribed on the statute book, because the government of the day declined to give the time or any of the assistance necessary for carrying the required stages through the House.

But the conflict and the result which I have described—the overthrow of the compensation scheme—is full of hope for the future. It was the voice of the people—the masses—the multitude—which really overthrew that great iniquity. When once they are as united and determined in their attack on the common enemy—Drink—as they have now been in resisting his assault upon them, his final overthrow is certain.

To spread the light, to promote union, and to perfect its own organization, is now the object and the duty of the Prohibition party. In that duty, it is my hope and my belief that they will not be found wanting, but that they will go on until they obtain their long-sought-for triumph over the Liquor Power. That triumph, when attained, will be indeed a great and glorious one, for the Liquor Traffic is by far the deadliest remaining obstacle to the complete success of that Temperance Reformation which Mr. Cobden has truly declared to lie at the foundation of every social and political reform.

WILFRID LAWSON.